

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for exchanging information between entities on a network comprising:
installing an annotation management system on the network;
identifying a plurality of annotatable data objects manipulated by a plurality of applications on the network; and
providing, via the annotation management system, one or more interfaces for manipulating annotations for the annotatable data objects.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein providing one or more interfaces comprises providing at least one interface for creating annotations and at least one interface for viewing annotations.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more interfaces comprise at least one graphical user interface.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the at least one graphical user interface is accessible from within one or more of the applications.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the annotation management system provides one or more interfaces for manipulating annotations for data objects contained in an electrical or mechanical schematic or a flow diagram.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more applications comprise at least one data analysis application.
7. A method for exchanging information between entities on a network comprising a plurality of applications configured for manipulating a plurality of different type data objects, the method comprising:

installing an annotation server on the network;
installing one or more plug-in components that provide an interface between at least one of the applications and the annotation server;
identifying a plurality of annotatable data objects manipulated by the applications; and
providing one or more graphical user interfaces, accessible via the plug-in components, for manipulating annotations for the annotatable data objects.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein:
the annotation server is installed on a server computer; and
the plug-in components and the plurality of applications are installed on one or more client computers.
9. The method of claim 7, wherein identifying annotatable data objects comprises identifying data sources and data objects contained within the data sources.
10. The method of claim 7, wherein the one or more graphical user interfaces are configured for creating and viewing annotations for the annotatable data objects.
11. The method of claim 7, wherein at least one of the applications is configured to access the annotation server without a plug-in component.
12. A method of creating annotations for a plurality of different type data objects manipulated by a plurality of applications, comprising:
receiving a request from one of the applications to create an annotation for a data object identified by a set of parameters;
selecting, based, at least in part, on the set of identifying parameters, an annotation structure defining one or more annotation fields;
generating a graphical user interface allowing entry of the one or more annotation fields;

creating an index based on the one or more identifying parameters; and
creating an annotation record comprising the index and information entered, via the graphical user interface, for the one or more annotation fields.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising storing the annotation record in an annotation store separate from the annotated data object.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein selecting the annotation structure comprises:
presenting, to a user, a plurality of annotation structures associated with the data object; and
receiving, from the user, a selection of one of the plurality of annotation structures.

15. The method of claim 14, further comprising receiving, from the user, a selected role in which the user has chosen to act.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the plurality of annotation structures presented to the user is dependent on the selected role.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising generating a graphical user interface for displaying the annotation information, wherein the annotation information presented to the user in the graphical user interface is dependent on the selected role.

18. A computer-readable medium containing an executable component for managing annotations created for data objects manipulated by one or more applications on a network which, when executed by a processor, performs operations comprising:

receiving a request from one of the applications to create an annotation for a data object;

selecting, based, at least in part, on a set of parameters identifying the data object or the application, an annotation structure defining one or more annotation fields;
generating a graphical user interface screen allowing entry of the one or more annotation fields described by the structure; and
storing an annotation record comprising information entered, via the graphical user interface screen, for the one or more annotation fields in an annotation store separate from the annotated data object.

19. The computer-readable medium of claim 18, wherein receiving a request from one of the applications to create an annotation for a data object comprises receiving the request from a plug-in annotation component.

20. The computer-readable medium of claim 18, wherein selection of the annotation structure is based, at least in part, on one or more user credentials.

21. A system for managing annotations for one or more different type data sources manipulated by a plurality of different type applications, comprising:
an annotation database for storing annotations separately from the data sources associated with the annotations;
a set of annotatable data object points defining portions of the data sources associated with the annotations described by the associated annotations;
a set of annotation structures, each defining a set of annotation fields;
a set of plug-in components, each for interfacing between one or more applications and an annotation server; and
an annotation server configured to receive, via the plug-in components, requests to access annotations for one or more of the annotatable data object points issued by the one or more of the applications running on the client computer and generate a graphical user interface screen, based on an annotation structure associated with the one or more of the annotatable data object points, for creating or viewing annotations for the one or more annotatable data object points.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the one or more different type data sources comprise at least text documents and database tables.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the annotatable data object points comprise at least one or more database cells, and one or more portions of text documents.

24. The system of claim 22, wherein the one or more different type data sources further comprise at least multimedia files and the annotatable data object points comprise at least an image.

25. The system of claim 21, wherein the one or more different type data sources comprise at least one of electrical schematics, mechanical schematics, and flow diagrams.

26. The system of claim 21, wherein the annotation server is configured to create annotations with no direct association to any of the annotatable data object points.

27. The system of claim 21, wherein the annotation server is configured to create annotations associated with more than one of the data sources.

28. The system of claim 21, wherein the annotation server is configured to create more than one annotation for a single annotatable data point.